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THE CHRISTMAS OF HAPPY-GO-LUCKY JANE

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Was Jane a nurse? "Perhapsly," Mr. H. Togo might have said. Maybe she wrote R. N. after her name, maybe not, but as a matter of fact, she was a graduate of the local hospital in a western town as breezy and as natural as Jane's own personality, which was decidedly out of the ordinary. Jane was original and witty, with a gift for repartee. She both played on the violin and sang, with great taste and feeling, and she was pretty, lovable and magnetic, but Jane was very impulsive and outspoken, lacking the "wisdom of the serpent." In hospital she was always saying and doing the things that "started something." She just couldn't help it. Some said she lacked finesse and would never get along, and that was too bad, as she was an orphan and had so few near relatives. Jane was born in England, her parents coming to America when she was a baby, and dying during an epidemic, Jane being raised in a convent. She had an uncle in Nebraska whom she had never seen, who was a miner and reputed wealthy.

But to return to the story, Jane as a "probe"! Poor Jane was surely a Jonah. If the rubber tubing got roasted, or the catgut was burned to death, Jane usually did it, or if she didn't, they said she did, about the same thing in the hospital, and she had won the championship record at breaking thermometers! And then poor Jane, who was sensitive and melancholy at times, would go away and weep, to beat the band, and wonder why she had ever studied nursing. As a matter of fact, it was a necessity, as her income giving out, she curtailed her education in the convent and entered the training school.

But Jane had a ready sympathy with sick folks, and in the main was a good and conscientious nurse. She also had a "way" with her, and the patients loved her; she could do anything with the children. This sometimes caused "feelings" in those inclined to be envious, but Jane being good-natured and forgiving, overlooked the demonstration.

After many "ups and downs," Jane graduated creditably, to commence the new and untried life of private duty, that seemed, at first, to be so full of interesting and romantic possibilities, but somehow the actual experience did not measure up to Jane's expectations. The sick people she cared for were not especially interesting (she had known most of them before), and in trying to live up to their expectations as to what the ideal and sedate professional nurse ought to be, Jane often felt like a bottle of frozen fizz water, that might explode at any time with a bang! Then

Jane's virtues sometimes had a way of rising up against her and upsetting the theories of what an ideally careful and prudent nurse ought to be. She was generous and free-handed and loved pretty things and the refinements of life in a way that often spelled extravagance. If she had a dollar, and didn't spend it on somebody else, she was apt to spend it on herself. One time she spent three dollars for a silver picture frame for her mother's picture, when she only had five dollars to bless herself with, and another time, having only a quarter left in her pocketbook, she gave it to a blind beggar one night on her way home, not knowing when her next case was coming. She found a case waiting for her on reaching her room, however.

Jane yearned vaguely for an untried life full of great possibilities, of people and things and surroundings she had read and heard and thought about, but had never seen; she wanted to see real life, and to live within its seething vortex, and do things. She wanted to see the great metropolis of the east, with its skyscrapers, and see for herself the romantic localities over which the author of the "Green Door" had cast such a halo of mystery and humor. So after making her decision and counting her resources, finding she had just one hundred and fifty dollars over her traveling expenses (one way), one bright, cold morning in December, she reached New York, and made her exit from the Grand Central Station. On looking around she felt rather awed at the size of the buildings, and at the curious bustling remoteness of the great crowds, so characteristic of New York.

"I'm crazy about the town," murmured Jane to herself, pensively, "but I wonder how I will get along. Perhaps it will come to me suddenly, like learning to balance oneself on a bicycle."

She made her way to a new club for nurses, that she had seen listed in a nursing journal. She was much impressed by the size of the building, also with the finish and elegance of the interior. She wondered at the system and thoroughness with which each detail seemed to be managed. It had the air of a high-class hotel for women, and the occupants looked like well-groomed women of fashion, and some of them almost like fashion plates. At any rate they looked very different from Jane's colleagues in the far western town.

"Um-m-m," thought Jane, looking at her own neat, but plain and rather countrified clothes, "I see where this little Country Cousin will have to get a gown." Her heart thrilled with the anticipation of shopping, but she did not anticipate the high prices. She purchased a suit of fine serge, daintily braided, and a becoming turban. They cost forty-five dollars. Then white kid gloves and tan kid boots took another twelve, and they looked well. But these expenses made a sad deficit in her exchequer. "Oh, well," thought Jane, "I'll soon make the money, the town seems full of it," so she called upon some physicians she had on her list. They were mostly court-

eous and attentive, and usually wound up the interview by saying, "Why, yes, Miss Brown, I will be glad to add your name to my list, but of course you know that I must call first upon the nurses and hospitals I know. You are probably an excellent nurse, but you are from a western hospital I know nothing about," or words to that effect. Then Jane found that she must await her turn at the registries until her papers came before the board meeting.

And to Jane, fresh from the west, the social atmosphere seemed decidedly frappe. The nurses were not at all rude to her, nor did they seem to purposely avoid her, but they had that air of reserve and well-bred indifference that she had noticed in the crowds. She worked in the Red Cross room, but no one made overtures to her, and she thought they had the expression of the Town Mouse looking at the Country Mouse, so she waited for them to make the first advances, fearing to commit some western solecism.

The days sped by rapidly, until one eventful morning, the day before Christmas, in fact, Jane awoke to the stern reality that she had just twenty-eight cents in her pocketbook. The high cost of living had done its worst to poor Jane. After a cup of coffee, she thought she would take a walk in the park. "There are the children and the squirrels left," she thought. Poor Jane! As she walked along she felt about as optimistic as a straw dummy, and about as warm. Her clothes, though elegant, were not built for the wintry cold, so walking rapidly she reached the park entrance. There she came upon a group of children playing within call of their nurse maids. She smiled and spoke to one little boy, but he did not speak or smile in return, but giving her an indifferent, if not a doubtful look, retreated toward his nurse. Jane thought she would walk around the lake. Its unstudied natural scenery looked strangely like her home in the far west, so buying a bag of peanuts (out of the twenty-eight cents), she sat on a convenient bench in the sunshine. With an ingratiating coo Jane offered one of the peanuts to a nearby squirrel, but the squirrel pricked up its little ears suspiciously, and with what looked to Jane like a haughty and disdainful expression on its little face, hopped away. This was *too* much. Jane wailed inwardly, "Even the squirrels seem to know I'm from the west." She got up and walked away, toward the Avenue. Poor Jane! This was her first "close-up" of real life, and like all of us, she rebelled against the hard knocks that alone can teach us what real life is. She walked down the Avenue, her thoughts whirling rapidly. Twenty-eight, no, twenty-three cents left, and to-morrow Christmas, and another month's rent soon due. She never thought of telegraphing her uncle for money, never having seen him, he was like any other stranger to her, besides he probably thought her well provided for and in the convent still.

She thought of the little home town in the far west and the people

she had known. She had sent them cards of greeting when she first arrived (Oh you three-cent postage!), but had not heard from any of them, so far. "Even the superintendent of the hospital would look good to me now," thought Jane, and clenching her hand convulsively, her white kid gloves split down the palm. (They cost two-fifty.)

The tears began to come, and Jane retreated in consternation down a side street, to think. What else could she do? She had entered her name for war service some time before, but they were taking the eastern nurses first. She did not have a teacher's certificate. She might be a lady agent for "Peruna." Why, thought Jane, even an ordinary hired girl has a happier and a better life than I have now. *A hired girl! Why not?* Jane giggled a little, in spite of herself, it seemed so like O. Henry. Just then she passed an office on which was a sign, "High-Class Help Wanted." "I just believe I'll do it," she thought, "I'll slave in somebody's kitchen for a week or a month, if necessary. They pay most anything just now, and give lovely presents to get one to stay. Besides, nobody can say I am a slacker, and they can't say I am not 'high-class' either," and in her usual impulsive style, Jane drew down her veil and entered the office.

The woman at the desk also seemed typical of New York. She glanced keenly and suspiciously at Jane, and then approvingly at her clothes. She did not ask many questions, but called a lady in the adjoining room. "My dear Mrs. Van Rensselaer," she said with a smirk and an ingratiating bow, "I have selected this applicant who seems to me the most suitable of any to serve in your family."

Jane looked at the lady. She was dressed in a violet velvet suit and hat, carried a gold lorgnette, and had a face like a cartoon. Raising her lorgnette, she gave Jane a suspicious glance, which softened when she saw the clothes. After all, she liked to see her servants going from her house well dressed.

"Are you experienced?" said the lady, vigorously. "Y-y-yes ma'am," stammered poor Jane with violent timidity (like Willie Collier, but Jane didn't know that, never having seen him). "Can you make beds?" "Oh, yes ma'am," said Jane, with a start. (She could). "Very good! And can you cook?" said the lady, after the manner of exploding a gas bomb. Jane colored violently. "Oh, yes ma'am," she said. (It was commonly reported in the hospital that Jane could not even boil water without scorching it.) "Very well then, I shall expect you at nine o'clock in the morning. Be on time, I like my servants to be punctual, and don't bring your trunk until I decide whether you will suit or not."

The woman at the desk looked at Jane severely. "You're a very lucky girl," she said, "to get in a family like that. Be sure and be a credit to me," and with a nod of dismissal turned to a new-comer. Jane walked to the street, pondering deeply. "They didn't ask me for references (that's the

clothes) and they didn't say anything about the pay. Oh you little Country Girl, they're putting it over on you already, but I'll teach them, and oh, Jane Brown, you've been and gone and done it. What would the superintendent say if she knew, and Uncle James Brown, whom they say is the mayor of his town, and next in line for senator? Still," thought she, "there are a few more hours of life left to me, and I'll have the maddest, merriest time," and then thinking of the twenty-three cents, she changed her mind, and walked soberly in the direction of her club. She must put forth her best efforts, for they must not suspect anything. "All is over now," thought poor Jane, and then she suddenly thought of the quarter she gave the blind beggar, and the case that followed.

As she approached the desk, the clerk looked up at her, interested and excited. "I've been looking for you everywhere, Miss Brown," she said. "Here is a telegram for you." Jane opened it mechanically. "What more bad news!" It was from the superintendent of the hospital and ran: "The Hon. James Brown called. Worried over your absence. Spend Christmas Day with you New York." She read the words hardly believing her senses.

"And then here is a box of flowers, also." The tag read, "From an old patient." There were also cards of greeting from nearly all her old friends. It was more than Jane could stand. She thanked the clerk and went up to her room. At her door she was accosted again, by a nurse resident, who with the imitation that is the sincerest flattery, was wearing a turban copied faithfully from Jane's.

"Oh, Miss Brown," she was saying, "I was asked to request you to take the part of Miss Columbia at the *Pageant* to-morrow night. They thought you could fill the part so well. Thanks, good-bye." Jane went into her room and sat down stupidly. So New York had a heart, and had "come across." And then, there were those other things, but she was tired and would go to bed. No, before that, a message to Mrs. Van Rensselaer, saying: "Dear madam, I am sorry to decline the place you made for me in your household, but on reaching home, I found my former position again open to me, and have accepted it. Yours truly, J. Brown." And Jane fell asleep.